



Programs and Opportunities

School Garden Project Brings Food and Education into African Classrooms

By Linda Habenstreit

Since the Republic of the Congo, a former French colony, and the Republic of Rwanda, a former Belgium colony, achieved independence in 1960 and 1959, respectively, both countries have suffered political and economic upheaval, civil war and, in the case of Rwanda, the genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. But today, both countries are making great strides in recovering from their difficult pasts and laying the foundation for a sound future.

The Republic of the Congo has been working on political and economic reform. In 2004, the International Monetary Fund recognized the Congo for its efforts to improve fiscal responsibility and transparency and agreed to a poverty reduction and growth plan.

Rwanda is committed to poverty reduction, infrastructure development, privatizing government-owned assets, export expansion, and trade liberalization. However, many challenges remain. Rwanda depends on significant foreign aid; its only products are tea, coffee, and coltan, a metallic ore; and, as a landlocked nation, it relies on good transportation linkages through Uganda and Tanzania.

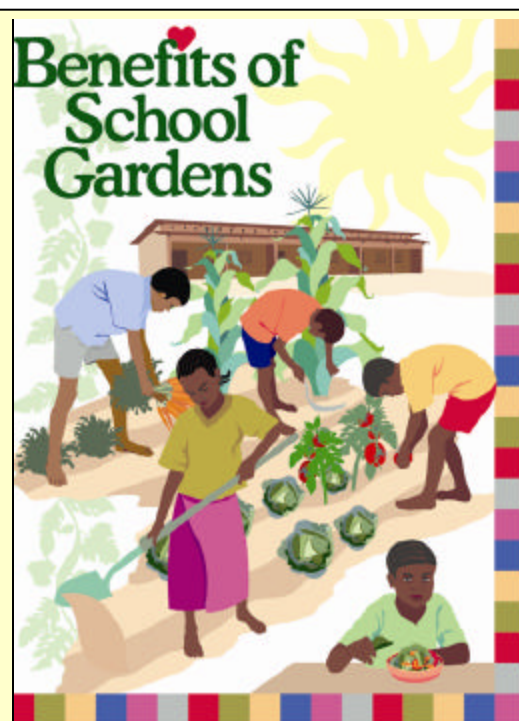
Both Congo and Rwanda were designated as candidates for MCA (Millennium Challenge Account) assistance in fiscal 2006 based on their per capita income levels. The MCA provides U.S. development assistance to countries that rule justly, invest in their people, and promote economic freedom.

USDA, in close collaboration with USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development), is helping the people of Congo and Rwanda meet their food security challenges, support sustainable agricultural development, and promote education.

FAS Worldwide talked with Jennifer Maurer, international program specialist, to learn more about a unique school garden project to increase the availability of nutritious food to school children in these two countries, while also encouraging attendance at school and teaching life skills.

FW: How did the Rwanda school garden project get started?

Maurer: First Lady Laura Bush was the impetus for this project. Last July, Mrs. Bush traveled to Africa with Cherie Blair, wife of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, to demonstrate their strong



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support for the G8's (Group of Eight countries consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States) renewed commitment to Africa's sustainable growth and development.

While in Rwanda, Mrs. Bush met with Rwanda's First Lady Jeanette Kagame and a group of Rwandan women to talk about education programs. Mrs. Bush was so

impressed with what she heard that she donated 20,000 textbooks to Rwandan schools.

When Mrs. Bush returned from Rwanda last July, an AEI (African Education Initiative) team, consisting of USAID and USDA's FAS (Foreign Agricultural Service) staff members, was asked to come up with follow-up proposals. In consultation with the USAID mission in Kigali, Rwanda, the team determined that a school garden program was a good fit.

With limited land availability—Rwanda is about the size of the state of Maryland—and a large population—more than 8 million people, Rwandans need low-cost agricultural techniques to develop their food supply.

In addition, because so many adults were killed during the 100-day Rwandan genocide in 1994, many children now are heading households and the ratio of teachers to children is very low. The school garden program in Rwanda addresses food security and teacher training needs, which is one of the AEI's three main components. It also demonstrates life skills to students and teachers alike. The garden becomes a learning laboratory for everyone who participates.

The AEI team based the Rwanda school garden project on one already begun in the Republic of the Congo. That project was conceived with the encouragement of the former U.S. Ambassador to Congo, Robin Renee Sanders. She knew that the AEI and FFE (the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program) had activities in the Republic of the Congo. AEI team members traveled to Lekoumou Province in the Congo in January 2005 to determine how aspects of Both the AEI and FFE program could be combined.

These programs had increased school attendance, especially for girls, because lunch was being served. The FFE program in the Congo, administered by the private voluntary organization IPHD (International Partnership for Human Development), had been in operation for three years.

To compliment the FFE efforts and contribute to the long-term sustainability of school feeding programs, we decided that a school garden project would have a positive impact for a number of reasons.

- It would become an additional source of food and serve as an incentive for this vulnerable population to come to school.

- It would also become a learning laboratory where teachers could incorporate mathematics, science, and social studies into activities in the garden.

We linked the school garden project to the AEI by proposing that the project focus on teacher training.

After USAID accepted our AEI proposal for Congo, we began searching for team members to help prepare the teacher training materials. These same team members are now working with us to develop the Rwanda teacher training materials.

FW: How were the team members chosen?

African Education Initiative Aims To Increase Children's Access to Learning

In 2001, President George W. Bush directed the U.S. Department of State and USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development) develop an initiative to improve basic education and teacher training in Africa.

The purpose of the AEI (African Education Initiative) is to improve the quality and increase the accessibility of basic education for millions of children in sub-Saharan Africa. AEI activities help improve primary education by providing training to teachers and administrators, awarding scholarships to girls, building schools, buying textbooks and other learning materials, and expanding opportunities inside and outside the classroom.

USAID runs the program, collaborating closely with host country ministries of education, public and private sectors, academia, and local and international non-governmental organizations.

The AEI has three main components:

- Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program, which will provide 250,000 scholarships in the form of tuition, books, uniforms, and other essential items to African girls so they can attend primary and secondary school
- Teacher training for more than 160,000 new teachers and in-service training for 260,000 existing teachers to improve teacher-to-pupil ratios and enhance the quality of education
- Textbooks and other learning tools, provided through a partnership with historically black colleges and universities in the United States



Maurer: We worked closely with staff from USAID and USDA's CSREES (Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service) to identify candidates from historically black colleges and universities and tribal colleges and universities.

The two experts who became part of our team are Dr. Michael Doyle, a botanist at Bay Mills Community College on the Bay Mills Indian Reservation on Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula, and Dr. Mary Crave, program development and evaluation specialist at the University of Wisconsin's Division of Outreach and E-Learning Extension in Madison, Wisconsin.

Together Dr. Doyle, Dr. Crave, my colleagues Jane Misheloff and Carolyn Schramm, and I developed teacher training materials for the Congo school gardens project.

FW: What kind of materials did the team develop?

Maurer: We developed a teacher training manual called "Teacher's Guide to School Gardens" along with a pocket guide, teacher lesson plans, and teaching aids, such as posters and demonstration kits.

The pocket guide supports the information in the manual. The kits contain seeds, garden tools, rope to make rulers, water buckets, cans, a scale to weigh produce, and water bottles to make rain gauges.

School gardens, whether in Congo or Rwanda, will teach the children on several levels.

- The school garden provides the opportunity for students to have an interesting learning experience.
- The children pass their new-found knowledge on to their parents, which they then apply in their own home gardens. This

helps families feed their children without having to rely on school feeding programs. The additional food produced can also be shared within the village. So there's a multiplier effect.

- The school garden introduces children and their parents to nutritious, healthy foods like fruits and vegetables and alternative protein sources.

- In Congo, the school garden program also is helping to address an important social issue by bringing Pygmy and Bantu children together in the classroom.

FW: When was the first teacher training in Congo conducted?

Maurer: The Congo school garden team trained 80 teachers and 20 Pygmy representatives from 31 schools during the first round of training in December 2005. Up to 9,000 Bantu and Pygmy children attend these schools. We are not specifically targeting one population over another but, while both populations will gain from this program, the Pygmy will gain the most. They will learn agricultural practices, with which they are not familiar as their society is based on that of the hunter-gatherers. In contrast, the Bantu have traditionally been farmers.

During the teacher training, we created a demonstration school garden at the Henri Bounda School in Sibiti. Since that training, our in-country partner IPHD hired a school garden coordinator to travel from school to school to distribute the kits and help each school choose a site for its garden and form a committee of parents, teachers, and community leaders to manage the garden.

To be successful, a school garden must also include government buy-in, ownership by the community, and involvement by the school.

FW: What point are you at now with the Rwandan school garden program?

Maurer: We are developing teacher training materials. When they are complete, we will conduct a pilot teacher training program in Rwanda.

We will incorporate lessons learned from that training into the final materials and present them to the Rwandan Ministry of Education.

The Rwandan Minister of Education has already mandated a school garden in every Rwandan school—all 3,000 of them. The Ministry sees the school garden as a source of income and food for the schools and students.

USDA Program Uses Food To Improve Child Nutrition and Education

The FFE program (McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program) supports education, child development, and food security for some of the world's poorest children. It provides for donations of U.S. agricultural products, as well as financial and technical assistance, for school feeding and maternal and child nutrition projects in low-income, food-deficit countries that are committed to universal education.

The fundamental goal of the FFE program is to use food as an incentive to improve education and nutrition. The key objectives of the FFE program are to reduce hunger and improve literacy and primary education, especially for girls. By providing school meals, teacher training, and related support, FFE projects help boost school enrollment and academic performance.

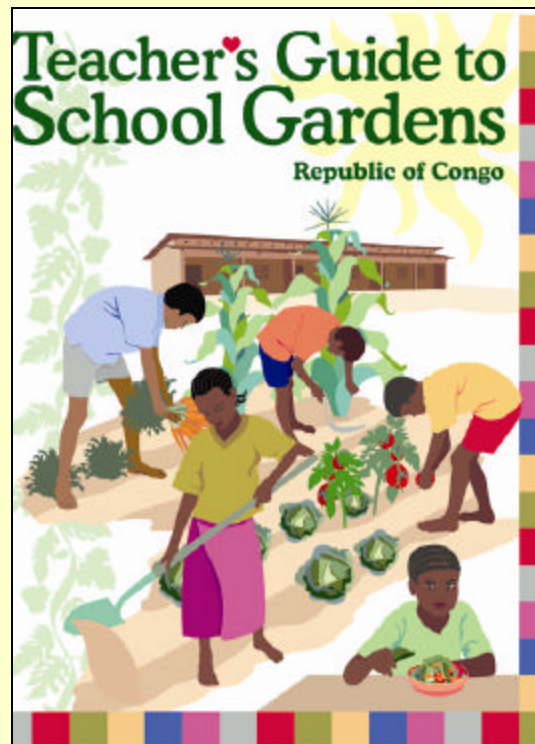
The FFE program also provides nutrition programs for pregnant women, nursing mothers, infants, and preschool youngsters to sustain and improve the health and learning capacity of children before they enter school.

USDA's FAS administers the program, which is named in honor of Ambassador and former Senator George McGovern and former Senator Robert Dole for their tireless efforts to encourage a global commitment to school feeding and child nutrition.

In fiscal 2005, the FFE program made \$91 million available to provide 118,000 tons of food to 3.4 million children in 15 developing countries.



School garden projects get underway in Congo.



The program in Rwanda differs from the one in Congo. In Rwanda, we are developing materials for the secondary school or middle school level, while in the Congo we concentrated on the primary school level. As a result, the materials will focus not only on basic gardening techniques, but will demonstrate the garden

as an ecosystem that can be supported through appropriate water management, composting practices, and animal husbandry techniques.

When we return to Rwanda next year, we will train 45 teachers in the north and 45 teachers in the south at 30 schools throughout the country. Instead of creating one demonstration garden like we did in the Congo, we will build a demonstration garden at two school training sites in Rwanda. This will help us transfer agricultural knowledge and farming practices to the community to address food security needs.

For further information, please contact Jennifer Maurer, FAS International Cooperation and Development area. E-mail: Jennifer.Maurer@usda.gov

Linda Habenstreit is a public affairs specialist in the FAS Public Affairs Division. E-mail: Linda.Habenstreit@usda.gov

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